DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 230 078 HE 016 046

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TITLE Strengthening College/Company Cooperation: An Ohio Perspective.
PUB DATE Oct 82
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Region VI Meeting of the National Continuing Education Association (Las Vegas, NV, October 10-13, 1982). For related document, see HE 016 047.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Students; Consortia; *Continuing Education; *Cooperative Programs; *Government School Relationship; Higher Education; *Labor Force Development; Regional Cooperation; *School Business Relationship; Staff Development; State Boards of Education
IDENTIFIERS *Ohio

ABSTRACT

Strategies practiced by Ohio institutions to strengthen work-education relationships are described. Attention is also directed to reasons for increasing the level of cooperation between colleges and companies and factors that inhibit cooperative relationships. Colleges and universities in Ohio participate in a variety of local, regional, and statewide activities designed to improve the quality of and access to adult continuing education programs, as well as to increase cooperation among colleges, government, and companies. For many years, public and private postsecondary institutions in major metropolitan areas have participated in consortia to foster greater cooperation on a number of issues, including transferability of credit and brokering of educational services. The Ohio Board of Regents sponsored the development of regional Work and Learning Councils in several areas of the state. One of the Council's activities is to provide a system for the identification, organization, and delivery of information on education and training as well as employer needs. The Ohio Board of Regents is also involved in statewide activities to promote major policy decisions regarding cooperation between business/industry, government, and higher education. (SW)

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# STRENGTHENING COLLEGE/COMPANY COOPERATION: AN OHIO PERSPECTIVE

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HE 016 046

## INTRODUCTION

Chronic unemployment and accelerated changes in technology have resulted in a greater gap between workers without jobs and jobs without workers. The education, training, and development necessary to reverse these trends will, of necessity, involve greater cooperation and collaboration among the providers and users of educational services.

Colleges and universities have traditionally provided general instruction for entry level workers, while companies have typically provided training for specific job-related skills. Only in recent years have postsecondary institutions attempted to be more responsive to the needs of adults already in the workforce through evening courses, weekend colleges, and a variety of credit and noncredit continuing education activities. College responsiveness to the needs of business and industry has in many cases become an added responsibility of and challenge for continuing education administrators and staff.

The impetus for this paper came from three years of focused study, development, and implementation of programs in Ohio to build stronger ties between the sectors of work and education toward the goal of economic revitalization. The observations included in this paper are the result of collaborative discussions between administrators at the Ohio Board of Regents (the state coordinating agency for higher education) and the Director of Program Development and Evaluation at the Management College of a major multinational corporation with world headquarters in Ohio.

This paper has a dual purpose: (1) to share some Ohio experiences strengthening work-education relationships, and (2) to add state-level and industry perspectives to a traditionally institutional focus on the administration and delivery of adult continuing education programs. Included in the paper are: reasons for increasing the level of cooperation between colleges and companies; factors which inhibit cooperative relationships; and institutional, local/regional, and statewide strategies in Ohio to strenthen work-education relationships.



Paper presented to the Region VI Conference of the National University Continuing Education Association, October 10-13, 1982, Las Vegas, Nevada.

## THE NEED FOR COLLEGE/COMPANY COOPERATION

In the past three years, a variety of approaches were used to make the resources of Ohio's 178 postsecondary institutions[1] more accessible to some 200,000 business and industrial firms in the state.[2] Activities linking colleges and companies were related to higher education's tripartite mission of instruction, research, and service and resulted from Ohio's participation as one of six pilot states[3] in the Education Commission of the States' Lifelong Learning Project.

The primary goal of the pilot-state activities in Ohio was to find areas of interaction between higher education resources and business/industry needs. Objectives of these linkage activities were to: (1) assess the education, training, and development needs of adults already in the workforce,[4] (2) determine ways in which these needs have been served and identify areas of need which were not currently being met,[5] (3) develop and pilot local, regional, and statewide activities which would enhance cooperation between companies and colleges in the state, and (4) evaluate these activities in terms of their implications for state-level policy and subsequent legislation.

Exploratory activities by the Ohio Board of Regents' staff resulted in the following conclusions regarding the education and training of the adult workforce:

- Most companies in Ohio are unable to meet all of their training and development needs internally and are looking to other vendors for assistance.
- A variety of organizations are now involved in the delivery of instructional programs for adults in the workforce.
- Many of these organizations have overlapping purposes and objectives which have resulted in duplication of effort on the one hand, and gaps in service on the other.
- Most companies prefer to invest in colleges rather than other vendors whenever possible.

A common thread emerging from the exploratory activities was the need for greater cooperation and collaboration among educational service providers, and the need to strengthen relationships between the sectors of work and education. It also became apparent, however, that there were a number of factors which inhibited cooperative relationships between colleges and companies.

## FACTORS WHICH INHIBIT COLLEGE/COMPANY COOPERATION

Colleges and companies have often been on divergent paths with regard to continuing education of the workforce. Common objectives have at times been at cross purposes because of a perceived "credibility gap" which was fostered over the years by pedagogical, attitudinal, and organizational/procedural differences. Traditional educational institutions were blamed for deficiencies in the preparation of the workforce, primarily in the areas of language, computational, communication, interpersonal, and problem-solving skills. At the same time, educational institutions were reluctant to respond too vigorously to the corporate world in order to provide general education for a broader set of interests. More specifically, a number of factors identified by both colleges and companies in Ohio which inhibit cooperation between their respective organizations, are related to the following issues: access, quality, cost effectiveness of programs, and internal organizational barriers.

### Access

One of the factors inhibiting cooperation is company access to instructional programs which are specifically tailored to their needs. Inability to gain initial access to the college, inflexible college operating procedures, and standardized curricula and teaching methods have made the use of local educational resources less attractive to company personnel.

College personnel also experience problems in identifying and gaining access to company representatives who can best articulate their employees' education and training needs. Company representatives at various levels of the organization often express differing views regarding training needs.

Another problem arises when company personnel are not familiar with either the educational resources available, or the operational procedures that exist at their local colleges. Company personnel, for example, may contact faculty members directly when a training need is identified rather than contacting a continuing education administrator. Contracting with an individual faculty member is sometimes misunderstood as contracting for the use of university resources. On the other hand, if the business person does not know who to contact, or contacts the wrong person and gets lost in a "bureaucratic maze," he/she may never call again. Often one bad experience leads company personnel to label the whole institution as being inefficient and disorganized.

Finally, many of the training needs of business and industry do not fit the patterns of traditional on-campus programs. In many cases, structural and procedural methods have not provided the flexibility necessary for implementation of the stated institutional mission. Too often, the college response to a training need is to prescribe an existing credit course, without working with company representatives to identify specific needs and mechanisms to accommodate those needs. The other side of this, however, is that company personnel do not provide enough lead time for development of new courses and implementing procedures.

## Quality

Issues related to the quality of instructional programs, including appropriateness of instructional methods and materials and the currency and competency of faculty, are items of concern to company personnel and to adult learners. The following are some of the most common complaints lodged against college instructional programs:

- Too much theory, too little practical application.
- Curricula, instructional materials, and teaching methods are not adequately designed for adult students with considerable life experiences.
- Course syllabi and instructional materials are not of professional quality (e.g., are incomplete, have spelling or typographical errors).

In essence, company personnel are looking for programs that are professionally designed and delivered and result in a demonstrable improvement in employee productivity.

Quality of programs is also a concern to continuing education administrators. In trying to accommodate company needs, continuing education administrators often encounter some company factors which impact program quality, such as:

- Lack of company needs assessments results in confusion regarding expected course outcomes.
- Company personnel sometimes have unrealistic expectations regarding the time it takes for course development or the time it takes to teach a particular skill.
- Concern for emphasis on practical application is sometimes at the expense of a sound theoretical base.

College personnel claim they could be more responsive to company needs if they were provided adequate information about expectations and if enough lead time was provided to design and implement programs.

## Cost Effectiveness

Cost effectiveness of programs is a growing concern of both colleges and companies as they face organizational belt-tightening. College and university continuing education courses are frequently more cost effective than programs offered by other organizations, as long as a critical mass of students can be maintained. Typically, college continuing education administrators operate on a "cost-plus" basis in order to offer programs which are not covered by state subsidy or institutional budgets. Thus, the critical mass of students is an important part of the cost calculation that employers sometimes do not fully understand.

Company personnel expect to pay the competitive market price for education and training programs. One criticism they have for some continuing education administrators, however, is that they sometimes overcharge companies in their zeal to offset other expenses. This "rip-off-the-company" syndrome is usually detected by company personnel and deters their participation in other college programs.

## Internal Organizational Barriers

Continuing education administrators are often faced with internal college barriers which inhibit cooperative relationships with business and industry. Competition between departments, or between individual faculty members within the same department, and negative faculty attitudes toward continuing education or toward programs for business/industry often undermine good programs. The lack of commitment by the institutional leader to company-related continuing education may also weaken the potential for cooperative relationships.

Company personnel in charge of human resource development also face barriers internal to their organizations related to attitude and commitment. In addition, myths that "all professors are eggheads," or that "educators know everything about training," are often perpetuated within companies when there is a lack of understanding about postsecondary institutions, their faculty, and their programs.

In summary, most of these barriers are nurtured by a lack of exposure and understanding. The academic community generally lacks a sensitivity to the values and needs of private enterprise. The reverse is also true. Opinions of each about the other, however, are beginning to change as they work more closely together. The evidence on both sides suggests that the climate for cooperation is changing. The possibilities for creative cooperative arrangements are limited only by the imagination and the strength of commitment of the leadership of colleges and companies.

## HOW CAN COLLEGE/COMPANY COOPERATION BE STRENGTHENED?

Ohio's colleges and universities have been tied to other sectors of society through board members, curriculum advisory committees, cooperative education programs, and placement offices. Many of these linkages, however, are in relation to instructional programs which are designed to provide education and training for entry level workers. Instructional linkages for the continued training and development of the adult workforce have not always received the same level of institutional commitment. In most cases, these linkages can be strengthened and expanded. The following section presents institutional, as well as local, regional, and statewide collaborative strategies which exist in Ohio to strengthen work-education relationships.

## Institutional Strategies

Fundamental to a successful work-education relationship is cooperation, where each party to the linkage relationship has equal representation. Several approaches to cooperative relationships, as well as examples of strategies used to strengthen these relationships, have resulted from discussions with college and company representatives.

First, strengthening the linkage process involves looking inward, evaluating not only curriculum and instruction but also institutional commitment, faculty/staff attitudes, and organizational procedures. This evaluation should result in identification of institutional strengths, weaknesses, and unused capabilities. Where appropriate, business and industry representatives and students should be involved in the evaluation process.

Second, institutional focus and commitment to working more closely with business and industry needs to be sharpened. Goals and objectives need to be clarified. This goal setting process should result in the development of linkage strategies which will capitalize on institutional strengths, improve upon weaknesses, and develop unused capabilities. The following points serve as a guideline for colleges in developing a focused response to company needs:

- Obtain a firm commitment from institutional leaders.
- Establish a university-wide plan for responding to business and industry--and make sure this plan is known to companies throughout the service area.
- Establish standards of excellence.
- Use expert faculty who possess excellent platform skills.
- Be responsive in a timely fashion.
- Understand the corporate client--recognize industry's values and needs.
- Be flexible.
- Be opportunistic and forward thinking.
- Be reasonable.
- Be price-competitive.
- Formulate agreements in advance on the specific criteria to be used in evaluating programs.

Third, an examination of the relationship between the college and the company should be made, giving evaluative consideration to issues of access, quality, and cost effectiveness of instructional programs, as well

as to the quality of the cooperative relationship itself. In terms of increasing the access to institutional programs, the following examples are illustrative of strategies used by many continuing education administrators in Ohio:

- All public colleges in Ohio have one individual listed as the contact person for business/industry relations. In most, but not all colleges, this contact person is the continuing education director.
- Some institutions advertise course offerings in company bulletins or special publications targeted directly to busines and industry.
- Colleges provide skill assessment and career counseling services on the company site.
- Admissions, registration and course scheduling procedures are streamlined to minimize employee time away from the job.
- Courses are often at the company site, or in a location central to several companies.
- Colleges provide instruction on cable TV or video cassettes which can be used between shifts, on lunch breaks, etc.

To assure quality programs, course objectives and methods of evaluation should be built into instructional programs and curricula should be planned in cooperation with business/industry representatives. The DACUM (Developing A Curriculum) Technique used by Stark Technical College in Canton, Ohio provides an example of college/company cooperation in the design of competency-based curriculum.

Cost effectiveness of continuing education programs can be enhanced by adapting existing structures and programs. Rather than extending college services beyond fiscal and programmatic means, emphasis should be placed on existing institutional strengths. In some cases this would involve the pooling of college and company resources, especially when expensive high technology equipment is involved. Another way to achieve greater cost effectiveness is to collaborate with other organizations on a local or regional basis. There are a variety of benefits to be gained through cooperative work-education relationships.

## Collaborative Strategies

Colleges and universities in Ohio participate in a variety of local, regional, and statewide activities designed to improve quality, increase access, promote cost effectiveness, and enhance cooperation among the sectors of business/industry, government and higher education.

Local Collaborative Structures. For many years, public and private postsecondary institutions in major metropolitan areas (e.g., Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, and Dayton) have participated in consortial activities which fostered greater cooperation on a number of issues, including transferability of credit and brokering of educational services. In addition, some of the rural colleges joined together to facilitate collaborative projects and to share resources. In some cases, the membership in these consortia included representation from major employers in their respective communities.

Regional Collaborative Structures. In 1981, the Ohio Board of Regents began pilot testing the development of regional Work and Learning Councils in several areas of the state. The Councils were designed to: (1) provide a structure for continuing communication and sharing of information regarding work and learning issues, problems and events; (2) provide a mechanism for the dissemination of information on educational and training opportunities appropriate to adult citizens in the area, and the articulation of employer training needs; and (3) increase communication and cooperation among providers and users of educational services which might result in better planning and utilization of limited resources. More specific objectives and membership criteria are determined locally, although representation has generally included existing consortial groups, and key individuals from the educational, employer, employee, and governmental sectors.

Regional collaborative structures are in varying stages of development in five areas of Ohio: Central Ohio, Southeast Ohio, Dayton/Miami Valley, Akron/Canton, and Toledo. Each of these structures are unique in their chosen emphasis and in their point of origin. Two of these groups are in more advanced stages of development.

One model, the Central Ohio Work and Learning Council, was established in a metropolitan community in December, 1981 for a one-year trial period to strengthen work-education relationships in Central Ohio. Specific Council objectives are:

- Exchange of information on programs and activities related to cooperation between the sectors of education and work.
- Exploration of areas of possible new cooperative efforts.
- Exploration of ways to eliminate unnecessary duplication.
- Development and refinement of a model for regional work and learning councils that could be transferred to other parts of the state.

This Council is co-chaired by representatives of the business and educational communities. Membership consists of persons from consortia and associations as well as individual business and educational representatives, such as the following:

- Colleges and universities: 1 technical college, 1 private university, 1 public university, 1 proprietary institution;
- Columbus Public Schools;
- American Society for Training and Development;
- CETA;
- Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce;
- High Technology Task Force;
- Higher Education Council of Columbus (consortia of 7 area colleges and universities);
- Ohio Board of Regents;
- Ohio Council for Private Colleges and Schools (proprietary schools);
- Ohio Technology Transfer Organization;
- OPTIONS (career counseling agency);
- Private Industry Council;
- Job Training Consortium (vocational schools);
- Business and industry: one policy-level representative from one company in each of the following categories: retail, insurance, utilities, manufacturing, scientific/research.

Council activities for 1982 centered around three tasks: (1) developing a directory with summary statements about participant organizations; (2) developing a system for the identification, organization, and delivery of information on education and training; and (3) developing a system for the idenfication, organization, and delivery of employer education and training needs. Task forces with equal representation from business/industry and education are mid-way through the accomplishment of the three tasks outlined above. An evaluation of the first year's activities will be conducted and recommendations made for (1) implementation of delivery systems, (2) continuation/expansion of the Council; and (3) the broader application of this collaborative model.

A second model of a work and learning council, the "Buckeye Tourway Business and Industry Training, Research and Assistance Cooperative Extension Service" (TRACES) emerged in a rural area in Southeast Ohio. Initiated by the president of Muskingum Area Technical College in Zanesville, Ohio, TRACES coordinates the education, training, and technology transfer needs of business, industry, government, and other agencies in a six county area, to promote economic stability and growth.

Membership on TRACES is institutional--available to service providers such as public and private educational, industrial development, employee placement or training organizations, institutions, or agencies in the six-county area. At this point, institutional representation on this council includes:

- 3 area Chambers of Commerce;
- 1 private college;
- 2 technical colleges;
- 2 university branch campuses;
- 3 offices of the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services;
- 1 Joint Vocational School District;
- Regional offices of CETA;
- Regional offices of the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation;
- Ohio Mid-eastern Governments Association.

The Ohio Board of Regents, Ohio Department of Development, and Ohio Department of Education are ex-officio members.

In contrast to the Central Ohio Work and Learning Council which emphasizes education and training and includes equal representation of business/industry and education, TRACES does not include direct participation by company personnel. Two full-time staff members are employed by TRACES to provide assistance to area business and industrial organizations in meeting training and technology transfer needs. As a collaborative organization, TRACES pools the resources of several area agencies to provide a "package" of services to prospective clients, rather than each organization approaching the client independently. Just recently, for example, TRACES was able to attract an out-of-state manufacturing company to its service area. The company relocation provided 70 new jobs in an area with a 22% unemployment rate, and training and technical assistance for the company were provided by several of the organizational members of TRACES.

At the end of this year, each of the regional collaborative structures will be evaluated as models to be used in other areas of the state. We expect that features from these models can be incorporated into other existing structures.

Statewide Activities. The Ohio Board of Regents is also involved in several statewide activities to lay the groundwork for major policy decisions regarding cooperation between business/industry, government, and higher education.

First, the Regents' staff made an assessment of services performed by Ohio's state-assisted colleges and universities for business and industry. These activities were synthesized into a brochure entitled "Ohio Resource Network: Mobilizing Colleges and Universities to Benefit Business and Industry." The brochure was distributed to state legislators, state agency and association leadership, and approximately 25,000 business and industrial organizations. It emphasized five areas of service: new ventures, technology, financial planning, production, and personnel. The brochure also listed the names and telephone numbers of persons appointed by the college and university presidents to serve as the central contact person for business and industry clients. Although the full impact of this marketing strategy has not been assessed, preliminary analysis indicates that companies have more often requested personnel services (e.g., training, testing, and evaluation) than any of the other four services advertised.

Second, Regents' administrators are working closely with continuing education administrators in Ohio on two task forces which may have major policy implications in the future. A recent statewide conference of continuing education professionals identified a need for statewide standards to assure quality in noncredit continuing education programs. Thus, a Task Force on Quality Standards is currently studying the issue of quality and will make recommendations regarding standards and implementation procedures by October, 1983. The Task Force includes representatives of college/university continuing education administrators, college/university academic affairs officers, and client groups (e.g., students, human resource development personnel in business and industry).

At the same statewide conference, it was also suggested that Ohio should organize its continuing education professionals into one statewide group rather than remain fragmented in the two groups which currently exist (two-year and four-year public colleges have separate associations). Thus, a second task force is being developed to make recommendations regarding the structure and functions of a statewide continuing education organization.

Several outcomes are anticipated as a result of the activities of these two task forces. First, strength in unity will prevail when continuing education issues reach the policy-making stage. Second, wider participation, including consumer groups, will exist in the policy-making process. Finally, greater credibility will be gained at the institutional, community, and state level when continuing education professionals demonstrate their concern for excellence through the implementation of measurable, quality standards.

Finally, the Regents' 1982 Master Plan for Higher Education seeks to examine the objectives of higher education and to address performance prospects for the next five years. Particular emphasis has been placed on the development of a "new social compact" between higher education and the larger society "to promote advancement of the quality of life in Ohio." Underlying the new social compact is the identification of areas in which the state's needs and higher education's strengths in instruction, research

and service intersect, with a major thrust on the relationship between institutions of work and education.

The above activities provide the basis for legislation which is soon to be introduced in the Ohio General Assembly. This legislation will provide the framework for a comprehensive statewide plan to coordinate higher education's contribution to the economic development of the state.

## SUMMARY

Cooperative relationships between colleges and companies need strengthening to maximize use of limited resources and improve the productivity of America's workforce. This paper focuses on Ohio-based efforts to strengthen these relationships. Reasons for building stronger work-education relationships were outlined. In addition, company and college perspectives regarding factors which inhibit cooperation were presented. Issues of access, quality, cost effectiveness, and internal organizational barriers were discussed. Finally, institutional and collaborative strategies for improving cooperative relationships were drawn from the collective experiences of state-level administrators and a corporate training officer.

Several factors made it possible to establish stronger work-education relationships in Ohio. First, the timing and environmental conditions were good--representatives from both colleges and companies perceive a need to work more closely together, and are demonstrating a willingness to collaborate on projects of mutual interest. There is also a concern on the part of continuing education professionals to improve the quality of programs and to target their activities to prevent spreading their resources too thin. But, much remains to be accomplished at the institutional, local, regional, and state levels to facilitate the needs of business and industry.

From a state-level perspective, some institutional changes are observable as a result of increased cooperation with business and industry. First, there is evidence of better planning and utilization of limited resources through cooperation with other service providers. Second, Ohio's colleges and universities have increasingly emphasized skill and professional development in the area of noncredit instruction. Third, structural changes which foster collaboration and cooperation are emerging. This suggests there will be better coordination of all continuing education activities in Ohio. Finally, these same structural improvements will provide a much stronger basis for formulating and implementing state policy to revitalize Ohio's economy.

NOTES

1. Ohio's higher education system includes 65 public campuses, 44 private liberal arts colleges and universities, and more than 70 specialized institutions such as art academies, seminaries, and nursing schools.

2. Census data from 1979 revealed there were 201,238 business and industrial establishments in Ohio employing more than 3.8 million persons.

3. See Ohio Board of Regents, Education Commission of the States' Lifelong Learning Project: Final Report of Activities in Ohio, October 1982. Additional funding was received from the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA).

4. Ohio Board of Regents, Employer-Sponsored Instruction: Focus on Ohio Business and Industry, February 1982.

5. Ohio Board of Regents, A Report on Noncredit Continuing Education Activities in Ohio, 1980-81; and Ohio Board of Regents, A Report on Noncredit Continuing Education Activities in Ohio, 1981-82.

6. For more detailed information on the corporate perspective of barriers to cooperation, see: Theodore J. Settle, "Interaction Between the Corporation and the University," paper presented to the American Association for Higher Education, March 5, 1981; Douglas M. Yeager and M. Daniel Henry, "Cooperative Planning Between NCR Corporation and The University of Dayton," mimeographed, 1982.

7. For additional information on the DACUM Technique, contact Jack Harris, Stark Technical College, 6200 Frank Avenue, N.W., Canton, Ohio 44720; ref. Audni Miller-Beach, "DACUM: Identifying Competencies," School Shop, April 1980.